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ABSTRACT

Signs or signifiers, composing what Lacan in 1968 called the "symbolic order," provide a means for making sense of the world and form a network enabling the human mind to form concepts. The signifier "literacy," for example, is often taken to refer to a fixed, isolatable concept, but this term would not be intelligible were it not for its relationship to other terms such as "language" and "education." Literacy, liberal education, higher learning, and similar terms should not be conceived as single or fixed ideas and should not be dissociated from the conversation of both scholars and ordinary people. There is a danger in permitting someone else to fix references for terms like "liberal learning," "higher learning," or "cultural literacy." If the dialogue concerning these terms is open, broader literacy--the kind required for speech and action--can be gained. (SRT)

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Toward Possibility: Expanding the Range of Literacy

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Borrowing from Umberto Eco's novel, The Name of the Rose (1983),

I want to begin with the image of a labyrinthine library in a mediaeval monastery. Thought to be the greatest library in the Christian world, it is hundreds of years old; but, as the abbot of the monastery explains, the books are there to be preserved and hidden, protected "against mankind." Any reading of them other than a sanctioned orthodox reading would expose them to "the forces of oblivion, the enemy of truth" (p. 38); so they--and the knowledge they hold--are hoarded, secreted in an impenetrable labyrinth. Only the "sage," the initiated, those who accept the claim that there is but one interpretation of every text and one alone are permitted to enter. Monks, however, are being murdered in this monastery for reasons somehow related to the secret knowledge; and Brother William, a Franciscan, has been called to solve the mystery. Once an inquisitor, he is now a disciple of Roger Bacon; and, when he hears that the library is sealed even against those in search of essential clues, he is appalled. "The good of a book lies in its being read," he says. "A book is made of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye

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to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb. This library was perhaps born to save the books it houses, but now it lives to bury them" (p. 396). When the library finally burns down, the narrator says that "it has been doomed by its impenetrability, by the mystery that protected it, by its few entrances" (p. 489).

I find in this useful metaphors for the themes I want to pursue with regard to postsecondary education today. They include the significance of openings, unveilings, multiple readings, namings of the world. When William talks of "signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things," he is rejecting the notion that each separate sign reflects the word of God, as well as the idea that signs can be separated from both texts and contexts and used to single out particular distinct ideas. He knows, as we know, that signs or signifiers compose what has been called the "symbolic order" (Lacan, 1968), by means of which we make sense of our lived worlds. They form a network that enables the human mind to form concepts and then to "speak of things." The signifier 'literacy', for example, or 'liberal learning' is often taken to refer to a fixed, isolatable concept. Actually, those terms would not be intelligible at all were it not for their relationship to other terms like 'language', 'education', 'tradition', 'science', 'humanities', 'rationality', 'scripts', 'criticism', even 'freedom'. It seems evident enough that the concept of literacy or the concept of liberal learning (or any other concept) can only emerge with some degree of clarity for us when we begin moving back and forth through one of such networks, allowing one signifier to play upon another. We become conscious of this, I think, even as we become conscious of the ways in which our very thinking is constituted by such signifiers, and of the choices we are bound to make--choices having to do with the kinds of persons (or thinkers) we intend to be. I am suggesting (as Brother William would) that literacy and liberal education and higher learning and the rest are not to be conceived as single or fixed ideas. I am suggesting as

well that how they mean and what they mean ought not to be dissociated from what Michael Oakeshott has called the "conversation" that civilized human beings have inherited, a conversation "begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries" (1962, p. 199), just so long as that great conversation is understood to include not only the voices of disciplinary scholars, but the voices of ordinary people across the years writing or speaking the scripts of their lives.

Suggestive as that is, it is not all I find in what Brother William says. Near the end, he speaks of Aristotle's view of laughter as a force for good. He says (and this is what the keepers of the library most wanted to keep secret) that laughter has an instructive value because "through witty riddles, though it tells us things differently from the way they are, as if it were lying, it actually obliges us to examine them more closely, and it makes us say: Ah, this is just how things are, and I didn't know it" (p. 472). And that evokes for me the critic Mikhail Bakhtin's comment on the uses of laughter, which (as he put it) "delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment--both scientific and artistic--and into the hands of free experimental fantasy" (1981, p. 23). Obviously, this connects with the importance of the imagination, the capacity to apply concepts to things, to create orders in experience, to perceive unexpected relationships, and to reach beyond the taken-for-granted toward possibility.

I wish to follow themes of this sort, you see, as I ponder enlarging the range of literacy. When I think of such enlargement, I think of interpretations and multiple perspectives, of the rewritings of texts, of the arts and of politics. I want to see schematic structures challenged and expanded in all domains as persons bring themselves together in "speech and action" to undertake new beginnings where reading, writing, speaking, and engaging with one another are concerned.

I want to think about creating situations in which people are released to look at things as they might be, "differently from the way they are." I am treating the aesthetic as a creation of the "as if," as an occasion for moving persons (through informed involvements with works of art) to recognize that there is always more in experience than meets the eye, that there are always alternative ways of seeing and feeling and paying heed. I am treating the political as a quest for a vision of a rational and humane society, again a quest beginning with the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise.

It is necessary to speak, of course, with the recent reports on post-secondary education in mind: the NIE report, Involvement in Learning (Oct., 1984); the AAC report, Integrity in the College Curriculum (Feb., 1985); and William Bennett's "To Reclaim a Legacy" (Nov., 1984). Various in mood and emphasis though they are, they are alike in their preoccupation with the decline of higher learning, which implies a belief that things were better in time past. There is a sense in all of them (even in the explicitly future-oriented NIE statement) that we have lost something, that we have failed to preserve something. It may be a clearly defined "knowledge base" subject to appropriate evaluation; it may be a core of liberal learning; it may be a quality and rationality overwhelmed by specialization and democratization; it may be (as it appears to be for Secretary Bennett) our "just inheritance," acquaintance with the canonical books of the great tradition, what is called (and what some hope to reconstitute) "cultural literacy."

Whether the emphasis is on improved teaching, on ways of acquiring or creating knowledge, on intellectual skills and in-depth study, the reports all note the vocational interests of students, the mass of relatively unprepared youth, the indifference of research-oriented graduate faculties, the ill effects of specialization, the importance of liberal learning, and the need for both excellence

and diversity at a time of financial stress. They tend not, in other words, to go the way of the reform reports on the nation's schools: they do not focus on the technical or on skill-development for the sake of national defense or economic growth. They are responding to the likelihood of what the NIE report anticipates as college education for all American youth, with all the problematic implications of universal enrollment. They are responding as well to the consumerism of the economically ambitious or the economically insecure: the desire to "buy" from colleges and universities what they need vocationally or professionally to get ahead in the world. Clearly, they are responding to the lack of intellectual challenge in the college curriculum, as they are to student resistance to challenge. And they all lament, in one way or other, the diminished understanding of science, history, and civilization generally.

Andrew Hacker, surveying these and other reports in The New York Review, was probably representative in his scepticism about what the proposals may mean. Students, he thinks, will go on looking for specialized programs that are likely to "pay off" economically, even if they are made to recognize that excellence in school is only indirectly (if at all) related to excellence on the job, and even if the correlation between academic preparation and what is thought to be success is shown to be increasingly low. He concluded his review by saying:

I am certainly prepared to grant that young people today do not read as much or as deeply as their elders would like. The world they inhabit revolves around popular music, television watching, and other jagged experiences that seem to encourage short attention spans and to attenuate vocabularies. Still, it would be a mistake to discount the intelligence and awareness of young people because many fail to express themselves coherently. They do possess a body of knowledge and understanding, and a politics as well, that will have to be uncovered and inspired if higher learning is to survive with any vitality in America (Feb. 13, 1986, p. 42).

It is, in part, this emphasis on uncovering and inspiring that justifies

a concern for unveiling, interpreting, reading (and perhaps rewriting) the world. Like Hacker, I believe we have to acknowledge a fundamental literacy in the young; but I do not believe it sufficient simply to affirm that they "possess a body of knowledge and understanding, and a politics as well" that somehow pre-exist below their incoherence and short attention spans. Of course there are exceptions: there are always some college students who are self-reflective, restless, and critically aware. But the ones with which the reports (and Hacker) are concerned are, more than likely, the non-reflective, the non-critical, the consumerist. It is necessary, in asking what they "possess," to try to distinguish knowledge from information and to identify the difference between knowledge that is reflectively gained and that which is passively absorbed.

Indeed, I am struck by the failure of the reports to note that passivity, the placid (or defensive) taking in of messages that predefine and, in effect, preinterpret social reality. It is almost as if the metaphorical library, in this information age, has been casually opened to all comers by caretakers convinced that there is no more danger of heretical or unorthodox interpretation. Once knowledge is translated into discrete propositions or bits of information, once learning is technicized and treated as skill-acquisition, texts no longer challenge people to go in search of meanings, to enter into the life of language, to interrogate their familiar worlds. They become "closed texts," in the sense identified by Eco in his essays on reading (1984). That means that they actually offer little new knowledge; they keep repeating the same meanings "peacefully acquired" at first glance (p. 120). Readers are not asked to use "higher processes" of thinking; they are asked simply to register, to take notes, to report. They are not provoked to wonder, to interpret, to rewrite on their own terms. Soap operas and slick magazine stories are paradigmatic examples of "closed texts"; but The Scarlet Letter or a biography of Helen Keller or a history of the Civil War can, depending on how they are addressed and taught, be equally "closed."

There is some mention of this in the reports; but it is not related to the social and political context, which tends in almost every case to be ignored.

Again, I turn to Bakhtin, writing about a "one-sided official seriousness" that seeks to "absolutize the given conditions of existence and the social order" (1973, p. 133). That is precisely how I see the attitude behind the reports which seem to me to lack any sense of alternatives, any sense of the precariousness of the historical moment, any recognition of open possibility. Of course they touch on the apparently important domains: inquiry, logical thinking, analysis, historical consciousness, critique, the sciences, the arts, mathematics, values (whether viewed as skills or "character"). They even mention civic responsibility and democratic obligations. But there is no mention of the silences in what ought to be our public spaces. There is no mention of privatism, of what Christopher Lasch calls so convincingly the "minimal self" (1984), the self caught in dailiness, in consumerism, in survivalism. Little, if anything, is made of the dominance of instrumental rationality and the value-free, cost-benefit language through which it finds articulation.

What of the seductions of evangelism, of fundamentalism? What of bureaucracy, that which Hannah Arendt called the most formidable form of dominion-- "the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the bat, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by Nobody" (1972, p. 137)? What of technicism and technocracy, often hanging over people like the "noxious cloud" in the novel White Noise (1985), first called a "black, billowing cloud," then an "air-borne toxic event," threatening a death that "would penetrate, seep into the genes, show itself in bodies not yet born" (p. 117)? What of the refuge people seem to take, the refuge in consumerism and comforting mythologies? This, too, is rendered in White Noise,

in a concluding description of agitated people moving through a supermarket where the shelves have been rearranged.

The men scan for stamped dates, the women for ingredients. Many have trouble making out the words. Smeared print, ghost images. In the altered shelves, the ambient roar, in the plain and heartless fact of their decline, they try to work their way through confusion. But in the end it doesn't matter what they see or think they see. The terminals are equipped with holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly. This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living. And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead (p. 326).

The reports take no account of dislocation or disorientation, nor of the defenses people erect through consumerism, exercise schedules, Walkman devices, VCRs, videos, cocaine. They take no account of the number of men and women who resemble the hero (or the anti-hero) of Anne Tyler's The Accidental Tourist (1985), the one who hides in the familiar, the repetitive, the mundane--and writes travel guidebooks for ^{traveling} businessmen who do not want to leave home. The guidebooks mask the foreign and the strange by identifying the local MacDonald's, the Hilton, the Yankee Delight, "webbed canvas suitcase stands, ceiling sprinklers, and laminated lists of fire regulations," by replicating over and over the same scripts by those who cannot bear to be in London (when they actually are in London) in Athens or Paris or Berlin.

Perhaps it takes a Czech writer to render what seems to me to be most shockingly ignored in the reports. I am thinking of Milan Kundera and his novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1984) and its representations of what is called "kitsch." The word is a sign that leads to other signs; but, at one point, the

narrator explains that it is a German word out^{.p} the sentimental nineteenth century. Although its original meaning has been obliterated, kitsch "excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (p. 248). It may take the form of a universally recognizable piety, deriving "from the basic images people have engraved on their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running on the grass, the motherland betrayed, first love" (p. 251). It may take the form of resounding doctrinal statements, or what Kundera calls a "Grand March...the splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness; it goes on and on, obstacles notwithstanding, for obstacles there must be if the march is to be the Grand March" (p. 257). A character, Tereza, has a dream about the true function of kitsch: "kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death." Whatever it curtains off or veils or hides, it becomes another phenomenon meant to close the texts of people's lived lives. And I am trying to suggest that the sense of a closed text--one that is already finished, "given," predefined--blocks off not only the "higher thinking" processes. It thrusts people into surface compliances and indifference. It stops initiative and, by doing so, erodes the consciousness of agency.

I am concerned about the fact that present discourse about postsecondary education, in ignoring contexts or "absolutizing" them, not only avoids talk of the nuclear threat, of drugs, of the AIDS epidemic, of child hunger and child abuse, of homelessness, of industrial dislocation, of the de-skilling proceeding on all sides. The devices used to deny these events and phenomena, to set up "folding screens" are also ignored, even though they may be the very factors that stand in the way of learning to learn or of actually engaging with what is called "liberal learning." In the AAC report the authors list a series of experiences they believe essential to the kind of education that will permit Americans to live responsibly and joyfully, fulfilling their promise as individual humans and their obligations as democratic citizens. Are they themselves making a serious

promise? A prediction? Are they engaging in mystification? How can they know? How can any of us know?

Preoccupied with closures, then, with seriousness, with taken-for-grantedness, I want to turn once more toward possibility. To speak of it, of course, is to speak of projecting into the future without any guarantee of what that future will be. Possibilities are not predictions; nor are they to be viewed as general sets of potentialities. The word suggests a way of being in the world, of reaching beyond towards what is not yet. The experience of possibility depends a great deal on the awareness of incompleteness--on, let us say, the recognition that, from a lived vantage point, our perspectives are always partial: we can see only aspects, only profiles of things, whether mountains in the distance, student faces in the classroom, carnival or crime in the street. There is always more, in other words, to see, to grasp, to know, as we take different vantage points, as we move and change perspectives through our moving. The experience may be evoked by felt deficiency, which arouses a sense of what is not yet and, perhaps, ought to be. Jean-Paul Sartre has written that "It is on the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our suffering and that we decide that these are unbearable" (1956, p. 435). He supported this with an account of workers who resigned themselves to wretched standards of living because, lacking the "education and reflection" to conceive of a better order of things, they did not name those conditions as intolerable. Only when someone pointed out to them the possibility of doing something to change them, did they perceive them as unacceptable. (Soon after, Sartre connected all this with an idea of freedom; since he said that to be free is "to-be-free-to-change." And then: "Freedom implies...the existence of an environment to be changed: obstacles to be cleared, tools to be used. Of course it is freedom that reveals them as obstacles..." (p. 506).) Maurice Merleau-Ponty evoked the

idea of possibility when he wrote of what he called the "human dialectic" (1968, p. 175). That dialectic, he said, is not exhausted by lived consciousness or awareness of individual existence in relation to a "world." What defines the human being "is not the capacity to create a second nature--economic, social or cultural--beyond biological nature; it is rather the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others." And then, a few lines further: "These acts of the human dialectic always reveal the same essence: the capacity of orienting oneself in relation to the possible, to the mediate, and not in relation to a limited milieu..." (pp. 175-6).

I would want to introduce the notion of the dialectic to highlight the tension in which living individuals exist in their relationship to determinates, to the environments, to the closed texts of any time. It is not a tension that is likely to be resolved in a grand and coherent synthesis, no matter how successful we are with postsecondary educational reform.^{But} I have already noted (as anyone might) the numerous ways there are of denying or repressing the tension, the unease. If we take Merleau-Ponty seriously, we might talk of persons refusing their own humanity, once they no longer test the limits of their milieux, once they no longer orient themselves to the possible. Provocations are required; laughter is required; imagination and art experiences are required, if indeed students are to find their present lives (as, in a sense, we hope they do) unendurable.

If we are to relate what might be called humanization to an expanded literacy, faculties themselves need somehow to reject the presumption of "official seriousness" and begin posing questions with respect to their relationships to the networks, the texts, the meaning structures defining the present time. When I ponder the reports, I find a peculiar (perhaps wishful) sense that knowledge and tradition and, indeed, culture exist in some timeless realm. When I read an ethnologist, say, like Clifford Geertz, I am sharply reminded of what Geertz calls "blurred genres" (1983, p. 18 ff.), of multiple realities, of discourse

communities. When I read Richard Rorty, I am reminded of the impossibility of positing what might be called a "rational commensurability" with all its implied restraints on inquiry. "By 'commensurable'," writes Rorty, "I mean able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict" (1980, p. 317). There simply are no rules common to all inquiry, anymore than there exists a single inclusive symbol system or a single valid mode of thinking. Like Geertz and many others, Rorty turns to cultural hermeneutics. Geertz puts it this way:

That thought is spectacularly multiple as product and wondrously singular as process has thus not only come to be a more and more powerful animating paradox within the social sciences, driving theory in all sorts of directions, some of them reasonable, but the nature of that paradox has more and more come to be regarded as having to do with puzzles of translation, with how meaning in one system of expression is expressed in another--cultural hermeneutics, not conceptive mechanics (p. 151).

He compares understanding between disciplines or meaning-structures to understanding between distinct cultures, between, say, anthropologists and aborigines (or vice versa). And then: "We are all natives now, and everybody else not immediately one of us is an exotic. What looked once to be a matter of finding out whether savages could distinguish fact from fancy now looks to be a matter of finding out how others, across the sea or down the corridor, organize their significative world."

I think that, if college faculties do not enter into dialogue about all this, if they do not confront from their own domains the places where knowledge is constituted, where it is transmitted, and the interests it serves, they are likely to be alienated from their students, from an understanding of work and social action, from the surrounding world. Of course it involves a challenge to the genres, the disciplines, even to what we have thought of as the forms of life.

Recognizing though I must the need for colleges and universities to attend to what publics are asking, even through their "blue-ribbon panels," I still see a danger in both faculties and student bodies permitting someone else to fix references for terms like 'liberal learning' or 'higher learning' or 'cultural literacy'. I believe that it ought to be part of the higher learning today to turn back and reflect upon the networks of signifiers that are mediated by and at once influence human subjects who are always in process, always in the making, continually involved in choosing and refusing. Establishing a space, a site for dialogue about how, say, the higher learning should be understood in a particular context, how various meaning structures relate to one another and the ways in which the cultural situation is understood, how students can be brought into the negotiation of meanings, college teachers may be able to break with their own enclaves and enter into something resembling a public sphere.

I cannot imagine easy consensus or unity of thought. Using the reading of a novel as analogue, I think of looking through various perspectives at whatever is thought to be the "world." If I do that with The Name of the Rose, for instance, in its multiple perplexities--its perspectives relating to various papacies and various heresies, its vantage points deriving from peculiar connections among the monks as well as from the inquisitor turned hypothetical detective turned semiologist, from the contemporary narrator thinking in both mediaeval and Borgesian terms, from the sighted and the blind, from the narrator Adso, now an aged monk, trying to recapture something that happened in his youth, and (inescapably) from myself--or you--in the role of reader, I am continually going to find dissonances and discrepancies, gaps, gulfs between perspectives (Iser, 1980). And, when I do, I am going to fill them with my own imaginings or structurings or creations of meaning as I work to constitute the entire novel as meaningful for me and for my life. If that can be used as analogy for dialogue in an open space, where each person is expected to say what he/she sees from his/her own perspective with

respect to the same object or the same world, the displacements or the discrepancies or the empty places allow the situation being considered--or the text--to remain open, to resist closure. Once there are openings, there can be an orientation to possibility; there can even be laughter in Eco's or Bakhtin's sense. People may be moved to say "Ah, this is just how things are, and I didn't know it" because they have viewed something from another vantage point or in another mood. Or, given the intersubjectivity of the situation, they may--together or separately--be moved "into the hands of" what Bakhtin called "free experimental fantasy." And I would hope the fantasy would touch upon the "blurring of genres," the multiplicity of realities, the effort to translate--and their implications for making sense of culture and heritage and what they might become in human time.

And I would hope as well that the dialogical mode might spread to the classroom, even the vocational or professional education classroom. Yes, I think occasions ought to be provided for the kinds of textual interpretations Gadamer describes, in which individuals open themselves to Hamlet or Moby Dick in such a fashion as to understand them, to allow them to "speak" (1976, p. 66). At once, as they open themselves, they bring some of their own questions and their own pre-judgments to visibility. Their own horizons may well change as they achieve a "fusion" with the horizons opened by the book. Not only will the book be unveiled, as its meanings are achieved; dimensions of reader consciousness, defamiliarized, will also be unveiled. And this, in turn, may release readers to pose new questions, to reach towards what is not yet.

But interpretations of plays and books and poems and histories should not be all. If a truly dialogic moment can be created, it might be possible for students to turn their attention to relations between and among texts, to textuality itself. Their own responses might be treated as texts, whether they speak them or act them. The way their expressions connect with others, the way their ways of

knowing connect with the epistemological structures that order what their teachers (or experts, or intellectuals, or those in power) know, the ways in which knowledge is differentially transmitted: all this might feed into the life of the classroom, always for the sake of opening what has been traditionally closed. If it is indeed the case that the vocationalism of contemporary students represents an obstacle to liberal learning or to critical thought, it becomes especially important to enable such students to read the scripts of their own lives and those that have to do with work lives generally. Arthur Wirth, concluding his book on productive work (1981), stresses the personal "craving for understanding" that characterizes the human being in quest of meaning in his/her life. He speaks of the need for dialogue and the importance of linking the idea of "good work" to a process of gaining saner productive development. He says that current efforts to solve problems of productivity "by nervous accelerations of mechanistic control methods" are foundering "because they ignore the necessity of an ethical concern--an ethical concern for the entheos, the personal enthusiasms that are the sources of creativity and commitment" (p. 258). It may well be that, through regard for the quest of the vocationally oriented student whose attitude appears so largely consumerist, that student too can be enlisted in the dialogue. I am convinced that the readings we all hope for (and, yes, the inquiries) can free the young to name their worlds, but only if the young have opportunities to rewrite what they read, to create their own knowledge, to pose their own questions, to reach towards what is not yet.

In her book, Imagination (1978), Mary Warnock writes about the sense that "there is always more to experience, and more in experience than we can predict. Without some such sense, even at the quite human level of there being something which deeply absorbs our interest, human life becomes perhaps not actually futile or pointless, but experienced as if it were. It becomes, that is to say, boring." And then:

In my opinion, it is the main purpose of education to give people the opportunity of not ever being, in this sense, bored; of not ever succumbing to a feeling of futility, or to the belief that they have come to an end of what is worth having. It may be that some people do not need education to save them from this; my claim is only that, if education has a justification, this salvation for those who do need it must be its justification (p. 203).

She is talking of feeling and of imagination and about the education of both. Reading her, I want to stress once more the pedagogic importance of the consciousness of possibility. And I want to suggest once more the central importance of experiences with the arts for the release of imagination and for the recognition of alternative realities. It is not that I believe that painting, literature, theatre, music, film and the rest necessarily make persons better or even more "cultured." It is only that works of art may provide opportunities, continually renewed opportunities, for openings, for "seeing." Of course it is true that, in our society, the arts are often ideologized and commodified; and that should be understood, as the workings of power in our society should be understood. But, in classrooms dedicated to dialogues and openings, works may be set free from what encases them and mystifies them and surrounds them with auras. They can be opened for attentiveness, for presentness, for the recapturing of people's original landscapes, for the grounds of human life.

And they may enable many persons to discover their lost spontaneity, to discover their own voices. If so, there may be greater opportunities to create the kind of spaces where political literacy can be gained, the kind of literacy required for "speech and action," for the creation of an "in-between" (Arendt, 1958, (p.182). Political literacy can only be learned, I think, as persons begin moving towards one another, appearing to one another, articulating their own perspectives, taking initiatives, becoming concerned. It is only in their intersubjectivity, their coming together, that they can invent projects for transformation, for re-invention of some aspect of the world.

I am fully aware of the play of power and its apparent irresistibility. I recall Michel Foucault stressing the point that the masses know far better about many things than the intellectual, that they know "without illusion." And he continued;

But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power--the idea of their responsibility for "consciousness" and discourse forms part of the system. The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse" (1980, pp. 207-8.)

This may be extreme. It may not be the case in many universities and colleges. But it may be well to take Foucault seriously. We can at least hope that, if persons (students and faculty) within universities and colleges can open spaces in which they can come together for dialogue and friendship, another kind of power may spring up among them. They may learn; they may laugh; they may come to see things as if they were otherwise. To "struggle," as Foucault says, "against the forms of power" may be to break the codes of the labyrinths, to teach in such a way as to open the texts of the world.

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